

Grayson County Economic Development Task Force

STATEMENT OF CONGRESSMAN RICK BOUCHER

Grayson County Economic Development Announcement

April 3, 2006

Historic Courthouse, Independence

I am pleased to be joined today by Ralph Tuggle, Chairman of the Grayson County Board of Supervisors, as well as other members of the Board and Grayson County officials, in announcing the creation of a Grayson County Economic Development Task Force.

The Task Force is being charged with the creation of a comprehensive economic development strategy for Grayson County. This strategy will serve as a roadmap for federal, state and local officials in working to identify and provide the resources needed to implement the goals as identified by the Task Force. The Task Force, appointed by the Board of Supervisors, will begin its work in the next few weeks and will present its report in the fall.

The effort is a collaboration between the Board of Supervisors and my office. In January of this year Ralph made my Chief of Staff aware of the interest of the Board in identifying Grayson County's economic development assets and the opportunities those assets present and developing a plan that will lead to economic growth and opportunity for the citizens of the County.

Further discussions between my office and Ralph led to a decision to convene a group, comprised primarily of Grayson County citizens, to begin work immediately to examine two specific areas of opportunity for the County.

New, cutting edge wireless technologies hold great promise for our region. I have recently hosted workshops to provide information about these technologies, which have the potential of providing more affordable broadband connections for citizens and businesses in rural areas such as Grayson County. These workshops were well attended, and I would mention that Ralph and Bill Ring were among those who participated along with Mike Maynard, who serves on the Grayson County Board of Supervisors, Independence Town Manager Kenny Vaught, Nancy Hawk of the Fries town council, and Fries Town Clerk Jill Hill.

Ralph and I agree that Grayson County would serve as an excellent location to showcase a new wireless technology. We are asking the Task Force to assess the current telecommunications capabilities within Grayson County and develop a

plan for extending broadband services from Galax and Independence into other areas of the County. I will be inviting the participation of state and local experts in the field of telecommunications to assist the Committee in its work.

A second area of opportunity lies in the potential tourism holds for Grayson County. Recently the U.S. Forest Service published its 10 year plan for management of the Jefferson National Forest. We now have an opportunity to assure that Grayson County derives the greatest possible benefit from that plan. We are asking the Task Force to assess the tourism assets of the County, both public and private, and develop strategies to assure that they are used in a creative and effective manner to enhance existing tourist attractions and to create new reasons for visitors to spend their money in Grayson County. State and federal experts in the development of tourism assets and strategies, including the U.S. Forest Service and the Virginia Tourism Corporation, will be invited to assist the Task Force in its work.

Finally, I have enlisted the Southwest Virginia Office of University of Virginia's Weldon Cooper Center for Public Service, based in Wise, to assist the Grayson County Task Force. The work of the Task Force will be coordinated and facilitated by Art Meade, Sim Ewing, and Travis Perry. I greatly appreciate the assistance the Weldon Cooper Center has provided to the effort thus far, and I thank Art, Sim, and Travis for the expertise they will lend to the effort.

I want to commend Ralph and the Grayson County Board of Supervisors for their vision in initiating this effort and express my appreciation to them for inviting my participation. I look forward to hearing the report prepared by the Task Force and to working both with state legislators and local officials to make the ideas of the Task Force a reality.

I will now turn the podium over to Ralph Tuggle for a more detailed explanation of the Board's vision and what they expect to accomplish through this initiative.